

VZCZCXRO2650
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #4628/01 3120128
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 080128Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3834
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 004628

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2011
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [KCRM](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: NEW EFFORTS TO COUNTER COMMUNIST INSURGENCY

REF: A. A. MANILA 4403
[B. B. MANILA 3404](#)
[C. C. MANILA 3779](#)
[D. D. MANILA 3793](#)

Classified By: Pol/C Scott Bellard for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. A recent Executive Order 546 directed the Philippine National Police actively to support the military in combat operations against the Communist New People's Army. One already controversial provision is the arming of civilian volunteer organizations at the local level, beginning in Mindanao. While many support more community-based approaches to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, the further proliferation of weapons in an already highly armed society rife with extrajudicial killings may backfire on the government. End Summary.

ARMING CIVILIANS

[1](#)2. (C) According to Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Assistant Secretary Brian Yamsuan, Executive Order 546, which President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed on July 14, directed the Philippine National Police (PNP) to "undertake active support" to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in combat operations against the Communist New People's Army (NPA) and other security threats to the Philippines. He explained that a key program authorized under E.O. 546 is the vetting, training, and arming by the PNP of existing civilian volunteer organizations (CVOs), which currently exist throughout Mindanao to help thwart local insurgent and terrorist activity at the barangay (local) level.

[1](#)3. (C) A/S Yamsuan emphasized that the government intends to expand the CVO program nationally. He noted that CVOs are similar to the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU) employed by the military, except that CVOs will act under local PNP direction. A/S Yamsuan added that civilian volunteers had previously undertaken patrols unarmed, but with training and with arms will now be more effective in warding off insurgent attacks as well as in gathering information about insurgent or terrorist activity.

[1](#)4. (C) A/S Yamsuan underscored that CVOs are funded at the local level, while local branches of the PNP will monitor and direct their operations in consultation with provincial and city government officials. He highlighted that an additional aim of the CVO program is to enhance mutual trust between communities and local security forces. A/S Yamsuan predicted that the combination of continued military offensives and these community efforts would reduce the NPA from its current level of about 7,500 combatants nationwide to about only 3-4,000.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS

15. (C) Separately, Marie Enriquez, the Secretary General of the leftist human rights organization Karapatan, voiced opposition of the use of CVOs to counter the NPA in a discussion with poloff. She claimed the CVO initiative would create a "wild west" atmosphere in the provinces. Ms. Enriquez expressed sympathy for the NPA, saying that conditions in the Philippines had forced people to "take up arms or starve."

16. (C) Other observers had earlier cited an alarming reliance on CVOs by Maguindanao provincial authorities under Governor Andal Ampatuan in skirmishes over several months with elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Officials of the GRP's peace panel with the MILF have also privately expressed concerns to emboffs over eliminating what are effectively private armies under local politicians in any eventual disarmament process affiliated with a GRP/MILF peace accord.

CALLS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

17. (SBU) Various national and local government leaders have long called for a more community-based approach to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, led by DILG Secretary Ronaldo Puno. At a conference in Cagayan de Oro October 18-20, Secretary Puno met with chief executives from the Mindanao region, including North Cotabato Governor Emmanuel Pinol and South Cotabato Governor Daisy Fuentes. National

MANILA 00004628 002 OF 002

Security Advisor Norberto Gonzales was also present. Secretary Puno called on Mindanao political leaders to draw

SIPDIS
up "holistic" counterterrorism plans to include the use of CVOs, which he labeled "force multipliers," to augment PNP efforts against the NPA and other terrorist groups. Noting recent terrorist bombings in the region (ref a), Secretary Puno declared "the fight against terrorism has now become an urgent collective responsibility of all Filipinos. Our governors and mayors should lead the way in mobilizing communities in Mindanao to help our law enforcers combat this threat."

18. (C) In an October 30 conversation with poloff PNP Chief of Muslim Affairs Colonel Sahiron Salim welcomed the augmentation of CVOs in Mindanao and elsewhere, which he characterized as "very useful." He added that, by arming the CVOs, the PNP will be in a better position to control their activities.

19. (C) Governors Fernando V. Gonzalez of Albay and Luis R. Villafuerte of Camarines Sur expressed support for a more local approach in dealing with the NPA during recent discussions with poloffs in Bicol. Governor Gonzalez underscored that, while the NPA was not "in control" in his province, it was nonetheless still able to "instill fear" in Albay's citizens, mainly through extortion tactics such as the "revolutionary tax," a forced payment by local residents and businessmen to the NPA. He said insurgents must be made "irrelevant" by building trust in local political and police institutions. He emphasized that economic development can more readily flourish with increased PNP -- rather than AFP -- leadership. Governor Villafuerte separately noted that the current ratio of PNP officers to people in his province was as low as 1 to 1,000, not nearly high enough for effective counterinsurgency measures in rural areas.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) At a time when the Philippine government and PNP are grappling with a growing number of extrajudicial killings, including by elements of the security forces, the further proliferation of armed civilians -- even under PNP supervision -- may exacerbate this problem further and heighten the climate of violence amid impunity that has provoked sharp local and international criticism. While the PNP's Task Force Usig -- set up to investigate and resolve such cases -- hopes over the coming months to re-register all weapons as one tool in identifying culprits and bringing to justice, the expansion of the CVO program and the additional arms provided to these individuals will make the Task Force's overall task more difficult, and perhaps even backfire against the government's commitment to cracking down on extrajudicial killings and on the Communist insurgency, as well as on wanted terrorists.

Visit Embassy Manila's Classified website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>
KENNEY